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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 000713

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TAGS: PGOV, PREL, HA, Elections  
SUBJECT: HAITI: POLITICAL PARTIES MOVE TOWARD ELECTIONS PACT

Classified By: Ambassador James B. Foley, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

1. (C) Summary: With the help of a Norwegian-funded think tank, Haitian political parties are negotiating a "code of conduct" for participating in elections later this year. The agreement under discussion would commit signatories to approximately a dozen general guidelines covering campaign "fair play," respect for the electoral law and for decisions by the electoral council and judicial branch, and acceptance of the results of the elections. The effort includes leaders of all the major parties including Fanmi Lavalas, but it is not a done deal yet and could still be derailed. If successful, however, and particularly if FL leaders sign on, this political pact would be a significant boost for the election process and would achieve one of the initial goals of the yet-to-be launched National Dialogue process. End summary.

2. (U) The Norwegian-funded think tank ISPOS (Institute for Political and Social Studies) organized a well-attended gathering of political party leaders March 3-5 at the beach resort of Moulin sur Mer. This second such "colloquium" (an initial one was held in June 2004) focused on the challenges facing parties in the upcoming election and on their role in the national dialogue process. SRSV Valdes, PM Latortue, Minister of Justice Gousse, and CEP member Freud Jean all attended and made presentations. PolCounselor and poloff attended, as did representatives from the French and Canadian embassies and the Norwegian MFA. Discussions were spirited, sometimes angry, but over the course of the three days the

colloquium produced a serious dialogue among political adversaries the sort of that one rarely sees in Haiti.

3. (U) In the last panel of the last day, KID leader Evans Paul, MOCHRENA leader Luc Mesadieu, and MIDH leader Marc Bazin proposed different versions of an idea that most leaders had supported in earlier discussions: a concrete pact among political party leaders that would encompass a "code of conduct" for the election season and a "governability pact" to regulate the process of establishing a new government after the elections. At the suggestion of Fondation Nouvelle Haiti Executive Director Rosny Desroches, seconded by popular acclamation among the participants, ISPOS agreed to take the different ideas and develop them into a draft accord that could be negotiated and finalized as a follow-on to the seminar.

4. (C) In the ten days since, ISPOS director Garuedy Laguerre has done just that, and party leaders are now reviewing a 12-point draft accord that Laguerre hopes could be finalized in the near future. The accord is very general, committing parties, among other things, to renounce the use of violence, respect electoral laws, run clean campaigns, and accept the results of the elections, and outlining a mechanism to address those who violate the accord. Laguerre told PolCounselor March 10 that he had vetted his initial draft through the group of politicians who had participated in last year's "Oslo meetings" (reftel) and made some changes based on their feedback. He had received positive signals from most of the Moulin sur Mer participants and was now working to convince a "critical mass" of party leaders to sign on, in hopes of launching the agreement publicly as early as possible (his efforts have been complicated, regrettably, by a bout of food poisoning).

5. (C) Not surprisingly, Lavalas is one of the most difficult pieces of the puzzle, according to Laguerre and Norwegian MFA official Kristen Langsholt (who has been the GON's point person for Haiti and has remained in Haiti to work on the initiative). Father Gerard Jean-Juste was one of the FL representatives at the colloquium and made a very hard line presentation, arguing that FL would boycott elections unless Aristide were returned and several other conditions were met.

Other Lavalas members present took a more moderate line, arguing that Lavalas should participate in the elections but that conditions still needed to be improved. None of them openly rejected the idea of the electoral pact, however, and Laguerre believes he can convince at least some Lavalas leaders to sign on. Jean-Juste told us March 10 that he was reviewing the text and that "it was possible" he would sign, along with others, for Fanmi Lavalas.

6. (C) In addition to the still-open question of Lavalas participation, some of the parties who went on record last month calling for Latortue's resignation have so far refused to sign on to the political accord. In particular, Turneb Delpe, whose party (PNDPH - National Democratic Progressive

Party) insists that elections should be postponed until a "national sovereign conference" takes place on Haiti's future, did not want to endorse anything related to elections this year. Others tell us that they want the electoral accord to go further than the current draft. MRN leader Jean Henold Buteau, for example, said March 15 that the accord needed to encompass more detailed obligations and a more vigorous enforcement mechanism.

Comment

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7. (C) The most encouraging thing about the proposed accord is the fact that a constructive dialogue among politicians with sharply diverging views is taking place at all. The Norwegians have been quietly but effectively pushing such dialogue for the past three years, bringing leaders from across the political spectrum to Oslo for week-long visits and funding training for party cadres through ISPOS. Because of the respect they (and ISPOS) have garnered, they are able to bring together the likes of Jean-Juste and other hard-line FL partisans with conservatives such as MOCHRENA's Luc Mesadieu. (The colloquium was even a forum for an impromptu hour-long meeting between PM Latortue and Father Jean-Juste, where according to one contact the two long-time Floridians shared warm stories about their adopted state and argued over "political prisoners.")

8. (C) This process is an effort to achieve quickly what most actors here see as the first objective of the yet-to-be-launched National Dialogue process: a political pact in support of elections. (The second phase would be a broader, grass-roots dialogue on Haiti's future that would likely not start until after elections.) This is a positive development and we are encouraging all sides to sign on to the proposed electoral pact as an important step toward a free and fair election. Precisely because it would be that, of course, Lavalas hard-liners will have difficulty accepting it. Unlike the April 4, 2004 Transition Accord that Lavalas refused to sign because it "legitimized" the IGOH, in this case Lavalas has been involved in the negotiating process from the beginning. Jean-Juste himself, despite his rhetoric, has given indications to some of our political contacts that he is looking for a way to participate in the electoral process. Given his close ties to Aristide, we do not think it likely that he will sign on to the electoral pact at this time, but we do not rule it out.

FOLEY

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